
Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Corrections

Testimony of
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Director

***“Department of Corrections
Public Oversight Hearing”***

Committee on the Judiciary
Phil Mendelson, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary.

I am Devon Brown, Director of the District of Columbia Department of Corrections. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the Department of Corrections' performance during fiscal year 2007. Joining me at the table is my Deputy Director, Patricia Britton.

Before I present testimony, Chairman Mendelson, I would like to thank the entire Council for the support that it has extended to the Department of Corrections. The Department's persistent and unyielding pursuit to become a model among municipal detention systems would be futile but for the cooperation and assistance that you and other stakeholders contribute in our efforts toward achieving this goal. As you are acutely aware, public safety is our highest priority and as such, it is crucial that an interdependence and partnership exist between the Department of Corrections and leading governmental and private entities in order that we might effectively meet the city's expectation in this most critical of endeavors.

It is always appropriate, as well as highly important, to note that the District of Columbia Department of Corrections is one of the largest detention systems in the nation. Our offender population consists of pretrial detainees, sentenced misdemeanants, and felons, as well as those awaiting parole violation hearings. The average daily, inmate population under the custody of the Department was 3274 during fiscal year 2007.

Most of the individuals under the auspices of the Department are confined at the Central Detention Facility, also referred to as the DC Jail. The DC Jail serves as the District's principal adult correctional institution and represents the primary point of entry for everyone committed to incarceration by the courts. The Department processed more than 18,000 intakes and releases through the DC Jail in fiscal year 2007, with an average daily inmate population of 2,164. The Executive Administration recently established a population cap at the jail of 2,164. This number is within the ranges recommended by two consultants hired independently by the Council and the Department's past leadership during 2004 and supports the Department's compliance with the Jail Improvement Act of 2003.

The Department also houses inmates at several privately managed correctional sites including the Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF), located adjacent to the DC Jail and four halfway houses throughout the City. Considering the enormity of inmate processing that the Department performs, it is reasonable to conclude that our challenges are greater and more complex than the majority of our sister detention systems.

The Department of Corrections' operating budget for fiscal year 2007 was \$137.6 million with a workforce consisting of 923 full time staff. The proposed operating budget for fiscal year 2008 is \$154 million and 945 authorized full time employees. The Department's budget includes an additional \$10 million in interdepartmental funds for contracts.

The Department addressed a number of major challenges in fiscal year 2007 with several hurdles yet to be overcome. Among the most significant challenges that we continue to face are the physical plant of the 34 year-old Central Detention Facility, workforce replacement, and population management. The Department's effectiveness in resolving these issues has been steady and in many instances monumental although our progress has at times become overshadowed by the encumbrances that we have encountered

on the pathway of major reform. We are nonetheless determined to develop our agency into a correctional system that truly reflects the capital of the world's greatest nation while surpassing the expectations of the District's citizens. I would like to highlight some of the accomplishments that have had a dramatic impact on the Department's overall effort to become a premier detention system.

The Department had the distinct honor and pleasure of having the city's chief government officials, including Mayor Fenty and you, Chairman Mendelson, visit the DC Jail to personally and objectively assess our operational strengths and areas of needed improvement.

Mayor Fenty has visited the DC Jail on two occasions. His first visit was unannounced, and was a comprehensive tour of the facility. The Mayor expressed concern about deficiencies in the physical structure of the facility that included the inoperative elevators and escalators. I am pleased to report that these devices are now fully functional after 20 years of disrepair. The Mayor conducted a Town Hall meeting with inmates on his second visit. This forum represented the first of its kind at the DC Jail and provided an opportunity for both male and female offenders to openly express their concerns as well as opinions about how the detention facility could be

improved and their thoughts on what measures our government could undertake to assist them to succeed upon release. Following the Town Hall meeting, surveys were distributed to the inmate population at large, which upon completion, were forwarded directly to the Mayor's Office for review and assessment. The Department received a summary of findings and is committed to addressing the identified areas of needed enhancement.

Chairman Mendelson, your visits and observations of the DC Jail have been equally constructive and resulted in the Department receiving additional resources, including increased staffing in the Records Office in particular. The Department of Corrections is determined to rectify the problems associated with understaffing this vital jail function. As a result, we hired 26 new employees in the unit, individuals who continue to undergo a series of intense training. We have also reorganized the supervisory structure within the Records Office and have actively recruited experienced correctional record office professionals from other jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the Department of Corrections and its criminal justice partners are working collaboratively to strengthen our ability to more effectively interface in order to promote increased proficiency in the inmate release process.

Security and Safety Enhancements

Needless to say, order, safety, and security are essential to increasing public safety and strengthening operational efficiencies within all correctional systems. At 34 years old, the DC Jail is an aged facility in comparison to detention centers of equal size and proximity. Moreover, as one of the largest jail operations in the nation, the building succumbs to a heavy volume of movement each day. These situations in conjunction with property damage imposed by inmates result in additional wear and tear to sanitation, and HVAC systems. These circumstances, coupled with the vintage of the jail, increase the likelihood that these systems will break down and require emergency maintenance. Despite the challenges bearing upon the jail's physical condition, a number of safety and security advancements have been accomplished:

- In June 2007, the Department completed a year of weekly testing of its community notification system to better ensure the effective operation of these mechanics. These tests also serve as an assurance to nearby residents that the Department of Corrections takes seriously its responsibility for accountability to the community, especially during emergencies that impact public safety.
- The Department equipped its correctional workforce with stab and

ballistic resistant vests during fiscal year 2007. This initiative represents a major safety investment for security personnel who have ongoing and direct contact with inmates. The vests are part of the official uniform and as such, correctional officers are mandated to wear them throughout their tour of duty.

- The Department received a \$44,000 grant through the Bureau of Justice Assistance to implement the first phase of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) in specific areas of the Central Detention Facility. The grant supplements the \$1.8 million allocated in the FY 2008 budget for placing this technology throughout the facility. This initiative will significantly improve order, safety and security within the facility. Installation of the RFID would allow security staff to track inmate movement throughout the facility in real time. Doing so would improve response time to emergency occurrences and provide significant improvement in inmate accountability. Additionally, the electronic record generated by the system would prove invaluable in post incident investigations because of the information it captures, including who was present at the scene during the commission of the incident.
- During fiscal year 2007, the Department of Corrections installed additional security cameras strategically throughout the DC Jail. These cameras allow real-time access to occurrences in the facility; provide crucial assistance in investigative proceedings, and allow greater surveillance of the activity within the facility.
- The Department of Corrections expanded its K-9 unit and assigned three newly purchased patrol dogs to protect the perimeter of the facility. Complementing this unit are three search and drug detection

dogs that better inhibit contraband from entering the DC Jail. The dog handlers and their dogs have completed required certification courses.

- The Department installed more security fencing with razor ribbon and enhanced exterior lighting to better protect its perimeter.

Federal Reimbursements

The Department continued to expand its federal collections for the care and detention of federal inmates. Approximately \$120 million has been collected for felons in our custody. We are exceedingly pleased to report that an increase in federal payments for this population was successfully negotiated. The Department of Corrections now receives \$106.62 per individual. This rate is the highest in the metropolitan area, and represents 26 percent (\$22) above the previous per diem rate of \$84.39. These funds significantly contribute to the economic vibrancy of the District.

Workforce Enhancements

The Department of Corrections has engaged in a vigorous campaign to recruit and hire staff for critical staff vacancies, particularly correctional officers. This undertaking commenced in September 2006 when the Department reinstated its first academy in 10 years. To augment our recruitment efforts, the Department began issuing recruitment

advertisements (“postcards”) in various community venues including Metro, barbershops, grocery stores, laundromats and other frequently visited locations.

- One hundred and fifteen (115) correctional officers (almost 20% of the security workforce) have been hired since September 2006 and another 44 are currently undergoing entry-level training to prepare them to work at the DC Jail and other Department worksites.
- The Department has received *approved funding* effective October 1 to initiate an even more vigorous recruitment effort to hire substantially more correctional staff. We recognize the challenge that this major venture presents as we are competing with state, regional, and federal law enforcement entities for individuals who are both willing and able to meet the unique and demanding challenges of employment within our system.

The enhancement of staff training has been yet another vitally worthwhile pursuit of the Department. For years, the Department did not adequately address this critically important function. For example, prior to 2006 only 22 out of a staff of over 600 correctional officers were certified in CPR. To date, all correctional officers have been certified by the American Red Cross in this life saving technique. Likewise, prior to 2006 few correctional personnel had mental health/suicide prevention training. Correctional staff assigned to work in the mental health unit at the DC Jail receive special

training in this most important area. Forty-five (45) correctional officers and one (1) case manager received 40 hours of Comprehensive Mental Health instruction in fiscal year 2007. Another thirty-one (31) correctional officers received eight (8) hours Mental Health Recertification Training, for a total of 77 staff trained and certified to work in the mental health unit. In addition, correctional staff receives suicide prevention training during pre-service. One hundred sixty-two (162) correctional staff has received training in suicide prevention in fiscal year 2007. Currently, virtually the entire correctional workforce has undergone CPR instruction. With the full understanding that the quality of our operations is profoundly dependant upon the proficiency of our correctional supervisory and managerial staff we have mandated that all personnel serving in these capacities (36) receive national certification by the American Correctional Association (ACA) reflecting their competence. As such, these individuals are currently participating in the ACA Professional Certification Program and are scheduled to be tested for course completion within the next 30 days. This undertaking is unique among correctional systems as it requires that all our correctional supervisors have credentials which meet or exceed national standards.

Additional personnel changes that support progressive organizational change include:

- The hiring of a Principal to oversee the administering of academic programs at the DC Jail. This individual has exceptional academic credentials and professional experience, particularly related to the juvenile population and holds a Ph.D. degree;
- The hiring of 26 Records Office staff and six (6) Case Managers;
- The hiring of an Accreditation Administrator to provide leadership and guidance in the Department's efforts to achieve American Correctional Association (ACA) accreditation;
- The contracting of a nationally recognized dietitian to review inmate meal menus at the jail. The hiring of this individual has resulted in the total number of dietitians serving our offender population to four:
 - Department of Corrections
 - CCA/CTF
 - Aramark
 - Unity Health Care
- The promoting of 41 correctional officers to the ranks of Sergeant, Lieutenant and Captain;
- The reinstituting of an Employee Assistance Program
- The promoting of a new retirement benefits package for correctional officers. The Department has successfully championed the District government's efforts to develop a proposal that would provide in part a reasonable incentive to encourage retirement-eligible, correctional officers to pursue this path. The Department testified before the Committee on Workforce Development and Government Operations

on July 6 in support of, “*The Corrections Officer Easy-Out Act of 2007*.” The first phase of this project requires that correctional officers complete a survey that has been developed by an independent consultant who was contracted by the Department of Human Resources to obtain input and feedback regarding their job responsibilities. This firm has performed similar tasks for the Metropolitan Police Department as well as the Maryland and Pennsylvania correctional systems with commendable results. The data gathered from the surveys will assist the consultant in formalizing the work duties and needs of correctional officers. This part of the process lays the foundation for the retirement packages of all correctional officers. Over 300 surveys were turned in by our correctional officers.

Health Care Services

The Department of Corrections is responsible for ensuring that its detention population receives adequate medical and mental health services, including physical, dental and psychological assessments and treatment.

- The Department of Corrections has embarked upon a community-oriented model of health care for inmates which has received national acclaim. Under this program, Unity Healthcare, Inc., became the sole provider of an extensive and comprehensive health care continuum for the District’s inmates. The program shows great promise for the future, with the largest challenge being the health care providers initial adjustment to the rules, structure, and overall routines of the

correctional environment. One of the most notable successes to date has been the discharge planning process related to the release of a seven day supply of medication, as appropriate, to District inmates upon transfer to the Bureau of Prisons, placement in a halfway house, assignment to a drug treatment program or release to the community. The Department purchases the medications at a discount rate through a partnership with the Department of Mental Health and Unity then re-dispenses medication based on physicians' orders. Department audits for July and August 2007 reflect a 95% success rate of inmates receiving prescribed medications at the time of release.

- The Department of Corrections' remains committed to the testing and treatment of inmates for HIV. Nearly 16,000 inmates were screened for HIV at intake between June 2006 and August 2007. The Department continues to receive national applause for its efforts in addressing this devastating disease. Earlier this month, our Health Services Administrator attended the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The conference included a first-time poster presentation on the District of Columbia Department of Corrections' automatic HIV testing program. Last December, Appleseed graded HIV testing and counseling at the jail a B+, the highest grade received within city government for activities directed toward addressing HIV/AIDS. In the coming year, Unity will become more involved in the Department's routine HIV counseling and testing program.
- Other examples of the outstanding recognition that we are receiving

for our inmate healthcare efforts include:

- Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-California) invited the Department to testify before the House Committee on the Judiciary in support of HIV testing for all Bureau of Prisons inmates. A Bill modeled after the DOC's program has been introduced by the Congresswoman.
- The Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center, the Prisoner Reentry Institute along with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our healthcare model through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The evaluation will include a baseline study, an intensive process evaluation, and an assessment of early outcome. The research team will measure early indicators of program impact among participants and measure outcomes suggestive of the effectiveness of the community-oriented correctional health care model on the access to and quality of services received.
- The Department of Justice, pursuant to the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment for State Prisoners Act (RSAT), awarded the Department a \$288,000 grant to implement a drug treatment program. The Department will collaborate with Addiction Prevention Recovery Administration (APRA) to implement a Modified Therapeutic Community to provide substance abuse services for up to 500 inmates annually.

Inmate Services

Among the most significant services to directly benefit our inmate population include:

- The Department transferred its entire female population to the CTF. This initiative allows mothers and their children to bond through contact visits and also promotes opportunities for increased educational and vocational programming that is not currently feasible at the DC Jail due to space limitations.
- The Department also reconfigured the housing and programming structure for its juvenile population. This self-contained unit provides incarcerated juveniles with additional space which is utilized as a school, a computer lab, and other rehabilitative activity on the housing unit. This reconfiguration controls inmate movement throughout the facility and promotes a more orderly, safe, and secure environment.
- The Department automated inmate account deposits, thereby allowing money to be sent to inmates through Western Union. Through this initiative money may now be sent online, by telephone, or by walk-in to a Western Union site. Funds are generally deposited into the inmate's account with 24 hours.
- The Department implemented the "Inside Out Dad" project, which encourages incarcerated fathers to become more responsible and committed to improving the quality of life for their children.
- The Department implemented the nationally renowned "Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT)" program at the jail. The program seeks to raise the moral decision-making strategy of individuals. Ten program staff at the jail were trained in utilizing the cognitive

restructuring method of MRT. Each participant received 32 hours of classroom instruction and four hours in preparation to facilitate group counseling.

- The Department continued to collaborate with other District and federal agencies to further advance its re-entry services including the U.S. Veterans Affairs Administration, Department of Employment Services, and the Public Defenders Service.
- The Department also partnered with the Office of the Attorney General to ensure fairness in the collection of child support and visitation rights of released parents through the Department's Fatherhood Program.
- A collaborative effort between the Department and the Department of Human Services, offers inmate fathers an opportunity to address critical issues affecting their ability to provide emotional and financial support to their children. Implemented through the Reintegrating Alternatives Personal Program (RAPP), the wealth of services offered allow these fathers to enhance their personal development and self sufficiency.

Community Outreach

The Department of Corrections recognizes the tremendous importance of maintaining positive relationships with the residents that we serve.

- In fiscal year 2007, the Department held three meetings with its Citizens' Advisory Committee members. This body is comprised of private citizen volunteers representing a cross section of the

community including religious, academic, business, District Ward residents and advocacy groups, who serve as the Department's link to the community. Through the Committee, community awareness, interest and involvement in Department of Corrections' programs are encouraged and Department staff is advised about pertinent community needs, concerns and developments.

- The Department conducted 26 tours of the DC Jail to promote public awareness of our purpose and mission. Tour groups comprised local and international government and legal officials, special interest and community groups as well as high school and college students involved in social science or criminal justice programs.

In addition to our accomplishments, goals for fiscal year 2008 include:

- Closing the staff vacancy gap;
- Enhancing in-service training;
- Pursuing American Correctional Association (ACA) accreditation for the Central Detention Facility;
- Enhancing education programs for the adult inmate population;
- Establishing a Corrections Surveillance Center;
- Implementing court release processing; and
- Implementing design work on the inmate processing center.

Chairman Mendelson, the Department of Corrections is committed to the ongoing, progressive, and sustained growth toward the formulation of a premier detention system in the District of Columbia that meets the public

safety needs of its citizens. We do so with the full recognition that the safety of the community is the greatest and most fundamental goal of the Fenty Administration, and the government as a whole. We seek your continued support as we advance toward fulfilling this objective.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you have at this time.